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ABSTRACT

In order to deal with the problem of increasing failures and dropouts and the negative impact of large numbers of students lacking basic reading and language skills on instructional activities and materials, the Sociology Department at El Camino College made eligibility for English 1A a prerequisite for its Sociology 5 course in fall 1975. This document combines a study of the effects of the prerequisite by the Office of Research and an analysis by the Behavioral Science Division. The data indicate: (1) a decrease in dropout rates, with a 31% rate for 1974, a 4.3% rate for 1975, and a 10.6% rate for 1976; (2) a significant improvement in A, B, and C grades, showing 50.6% in 1974, 76.7% in 1975 and 74.6% in 1976, with D, F, W, and WF grades declining slightly; (3) a significant decline in enrollment, with 1974 enrollees numbering 1,396, 1975 enrollees numbering 672, and 1976 enrollees numbering 598. The impact of lower enrollment upon the Sociology department is discussed in terms of reduced teaching opportunities for junior members of the department and the attitudes of other departments toward tightened academic standards. (LH)

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SOCIOLOGY 5 STUDY

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EL CAMINO COLLEGE

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OFFICE OF RESEARCH

JERRY C. GARLOCK, Ph.D.

SOCIOLOGY 5 STUDY

Results

Data were obtained from 849 students enrolled in Sociology 5 classes for the year 1974, 300 in 1975, and 304 in 1976. Twelve students in 1974 and one in 1975 showed no work completed or incompletes given.

Table 1 indicates the grades of these students in Sociology 5. The data indicate that the years 1975 and 1976 had grade distributions that were relatively consistent (within four percentage points for any grade) while the year 1974 was much more inconsistent (as high as 17 percentage points different). When the frequencies from which the above percentages were compared among years according to a chi-square analysis, it was found that there was no significant difference between 1975 and 1976 (X^2=9.61) while significant differences at the .001 level of significance was derived when comparing the years 1974 and 1975 (X^2=96.38) and the years 1974 and 1976 (X^2=68.38).

The data were combined in a difference grouping according to A, B, C; D, F; W, WF; and drop to obtain the distribution shown in Table 2. Differences in D, F grades and also W, WF grades are similar among the three years. However, A, B, C grades and drops are very different. The A, B, C grades constituted about one-half of the grades in 1974 and about three-fourths in 1975 and 1976. The per cent of drops was 31 per cent in 1974 and 4.3 per cent and 10.6 per cent in 1975 and 1976, respectively. A chi-square analysis showed significant differences of $p<.001$ for the 1974-1975 comparison (X^2=92.91) and for the 1974-1976 comparison (X^2=61.29).

When only the grades of A, B, and C were analyzed among the three years to determine differences, they were found to be not significant according to a chi-square analysis. Table 3 shows the per cent distribution.

Over the three-year study, five instructors were involved in the study. A comparison was made of the grade distribution of these instructors. Code numbers were applied to them for the analysis. The distributions were subjected to a chi-square analysis to determine significant differences among the grade distributions. A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 4. In general, the data show that significant differences of grades given to students among instructors exists for the years 1974 and 1976. However, in 1975 significant differences in grade distributions were not obtained.

Table 1

GRADE DISTRIBUTION BY PER CENT OF SOCIOLOGY 5 CLASSES
FOR THE YEARS 1974, 1975, AND 1976

YEAR	A	B	C	D & F	W & WF	ID*	SD**	TOTAL***
1974	8.0	19.7	22.9	5.0	13.4	18.2	12.8	100.0 (837)
1975	16.3	28.0	32.3	4.3	14.7	1.3	3.0	100.0 (300)
1976	16.5	26.4	31.7	3.6	11.2	3.6	6.9	100.0 (303)

*ID Signifies Instructor Drop

**SD Signifies Student Drop

*** The number in the parenthesis indicates the total number of students receiving grades for the designated year.

Table 2

CONDENSED GRADE DISTRIBUTION BY PER CENT OF
SOCIOLOGY 5 CLASSES FOR THE YEARS 1974, 1975, AND 1976

YEAR	A, B, & C	D & F	W & WF	DROP
1974	50.6	5.0	13.4	31.0
1975	76.7	4.3	14.7	4.3
1976	74.6	3.6	11.2	10.6

Table 3

DISTRIBUTION OF A, B, AND C GRADES BY PER CENT OF SOCIOLOGY 5 CLASSES FOR THE YEARS 1974, 1975, AND 1976

YEAR	A	B	C	TOTAL* OF A, B, AND C GRADES
1974	15.8	38.9	45.3	100.0 (424)
1975	21.3	36.5	42.2	100.0 (230)
1976	22.1	35.4	42.5	100.0 (226)

*The number in the parenthesis indicates the total number of students receiving grades for the designated year.

Table 4

SUMMARY RESULTS OF CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES
AMONG INSTRUCTORS FOR THE YEARS 1974, 1975, AND 1976

YEAR	INSTRUCTORS COMPARED	CHI-SQUARE	SIGNIFICANCE
1974	1 and 2	22.46	.01
	1 and 3	18.47	.01
	1 and 4	14.39	.05
	1 and 5	25.70	.001
	2 and 3	84.48	.001
	2 and 4	31.55	.001
	2 and 5	31.35	.001
	3 and 4	60.86	.001
	3 and 5	21.28	.01
	4 and 5	30.95	.001
1975	1 and 2	12.57	N.S.
	1 and 3	7.73	N.S.
	1 and 4	7.64	N.S.
	2 and 3	11.94	N.S.
	2 and 4	13.08	.05
	3 and 4	20.33	.01
1976	1 and 3	63.34	.001
	1 and 5	20.59	.001
	3 and 5	16.10	.01

THE ENGLISH PREREQUISITE AND SOCIOLOGY 5A

Beginning in the Fall, 1975 semester, Soc. 5A (Principles of Sociology) required the prerequisite: "Eligibility for English 1A or consent of instructor." The Office of Research completed a study of the impact of this prerequisite for the two year period that followed (1975-76 and 1976-77) with a comparison of data for the previous year (1974-75) when no prerequisite was required. The study was completed by Jerry C. Garlock on October 25, 1977 and presented to the department for the purpose of helping to evaluate the outcomes of the prerequisite. A copy of this study follows this summary along with a pilot study completed in 1974 which correlated dropout and failure experiences with poor performance on the English Placement Test. This paper seeks to evaluate these findings and examine some additional data regarding divisional drop rates and enrollment patterns.

THE OPTIONS: the open door, the closed door, the revolving door, and the alternative door?

The decision of the department to try out the English prerequisite to deal with the problem of increasing failures and dropouts in the Soc. 5A course was the product of much discussion. There was a desire to maintain in this college-transfer course a proper level of academic standards in course content, instructional activities, and grading. Quite aside from the grading and dropout data available in 1974, there was concern about the way in which a large number of students lacking basic reading and language skills adversely influenced instructional activities and limited the use of college level materials

The department had always been committed to a policy of the open door with respect to its course offerings. However, it had become apparent that for many students the open door had become a revolving door circulating dropouts and failures. Soc. 5A became the place of discovery for illiteracy, possibly a product of the large number of students who ignore both the benefits of knowledge from placement tests and the availability of professional program advisement. Undoubtedly many academic courses in the institution share this problem. And unfortunately what was once a problem of isolated individuals may become a problem of collective behavior. Often there is a "tipping factor" when the number of unprepared students can influence classroom interaction to the point the able student is denied the opportunity to a truly college-level learning experience. The Sociology Department sought to correct this problem for one of its courses.

Although Soc. 5A was restricted in the Fall of 1975, the department revised its other course offerings with several new offerings with the approval of the General Curriculum Committee. The course Social Issues in America (Soc. 4) was developed to meet the needs of students not accommodated by Soc. 5A. This course was idealized in

terms of especially readable materials, concrete subject matter with a minimum of abstract generalization, less focus on theory and concepts, and a very strong commitment to the utilization of audio-visual aids to help those who are purported to learn by watching and listening. It was the hope of the department that the Counseling Center would provide effective program advisement to encourage enrollment in this alternative course along with other choices such as Marriage and Family Living (Soc. 2) and Problems of Marriage (Soc. 3). Counselors were informed of this course and its target clientele, and it may also be mentioned that all English instructors were contacted by letter advising them of the Soc. 5A English prerequisite with the request that they might be encouraging to those students completing English 1A as to the availability of Soc. 5A as an improved college transfer course. Now what were the outcomes of these changes and efforts?

DROPOUT RATES

According to the Garlock data there are both substantive and statistically significant differences in dropout rates for the three years covered in the study. Dropouts during the first six weeks for the fall semesters of 1974, 1975, and 1976 follow:

Table 1

1974	(No prerequisite)	31%
1975	(Prerequisite)	4.3%
1976	(Prerequisite)	10.6%

When W and WF grades are added to the above, the following percentages occur:

Table 2

1974	(No prerequisite)	44.4%
1975	(Prerequisite)	19%
1976	(Prerequisite)	21.8%

This evidence should at least suggest the importance of basic English skills in influencing dropout experience in this course, and perhaps others that depend heavily on language facility. What is the most current experience concerning dropouts in other Behavioral Science courses for purposes of comparison?

Table 3

	Psych. 5	Psych. 8	Anthro. 1	Anthro. 2	Soc. 4
Spring '77	33%	53%	39%	38%	30%
Fall '76	30%	38%	44%	41%	33%
Spring '76	30%	34%	49%	35%	41%
Fall '75	27%	40%	35%	38%	40%
Spring '75	26%	34%	24%	36%	30% (Soc.6)
Fall '74	23%	40%	33%	40%	25% (Soc.6)

The dropout phenomenon is obviously not confined to a single course in terms of student casualties and instructional costs as evidenced by the above data. It is certainly not unique to the Behavioral Science Division as noted in another study. However, if there is

serious professional concern among the faculty and administration for the costs and casualties of our "dropout operation," then these data suggest what can be done about the problem. First, students need a realistic appraisal of their skills in relation to their academic objectives. Second, departments should identify courses requiring basic skills compatible with instructional materials and activities. Third, the registration process must effectively enforce these directions. Fourth, alternative and remedial courses should be available to serve students who are deficient in basic survival skills.

IMPROVEMENTS IN COURSE GRADES

Of particular interest to the sociology faculty in the Garlock data was the significant improvement in course grades following implementation of the English prerequisite. Taken from the grade distribution data are the following statistics:

Year	(Fall semester)	A, B, & C	D & F
1974	(No prerequisite)	50.6%	5.0%
1975	(Prerequisite)	76.7%	4.3%
1976	(Prerequisite)	74.6%	3.6%

Not only did the condition of eligibility for English 1A strikingly correlate with a much lower dropout rate, but those who completed the course showed evidence of higher academic achievement. According to an analysis by Dr. Garlock this outcome was not the function of some minor differences in the proportion of courses that were taught by different instructors during these three years compared.

CHANGING ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

The following enrollment data describes changes in courses for the three year study period:

Year	Soc. 2 & 3	Soc. 4 or 6	Soc. 5A	Psych. 5
1974 (No prereq.)	1085	687	1396	3915
1975 (Prereq.)	1300	869	672	4430
1976 (Prereq.)	816	784	598	4384
Fall '77 only	273	364	287	2076

The impact of the English prerequisite on department enrollments can be seen with varying kinds of conjecture. Most significant is the decline in Soc. 5A enrollment with the introduction of the prerequisite. There was a decline of 724 enrollees in the course. However, there was an increase of 397 enrollees in other sociology courses for the first year of the prerequisite plus an increase of 515 students in Psychology 5, the latter statistic seemingly of less interest to the sociology staff. It is also quite probable that

students denied enrollment in Soc 5A simply transferred their interest to other courses without distress. It is also possible that the statement in the class schedule about the English prerequisite might have discouraged enrollment among some eligible but unmotivated students who view rather ominously the prospect of term papers, written reports, or essay examinations. While sociology enrollments across the nation are undergoing a rather striking shrinkage, it is clear that the precipitous drop in Soc. 5A during the first year of the prerequisite was not due to ordinary causes. Obviously, tightening admission results in fewer sections. Now the Sociology Department, and any other department down the road, may rightfully ask whether academic gains previously cited justify the consequences of enrollment decline in a given course. Unfo[illegible]nately the focus of such an evaluation can readily become blurred by conflicting interests and desires of department members, and this has certainly happened in the Sociology Department.

First, there is the problem of sharing fewer sections of a course among instructors. What can be done with the instructor who is unwilling to teach anything else?

Second, what can be done to increase interest and effectiveness in working with the less able student enrolled in mainstream courses?

Third, what can be done to insure that junior members of departments will not be adversely affected by a decline in a course enrollment.

Fourth, what is the actual likelihood that other departments and divisions will share the concerns of the Sociology Department and take similiar action to upgrade academic standards? What of those among us who do not care about the dropout problem and failures, those who have kissed off professional standards of academic performance, those who ignore reasonable standards of grading, and even those who react to the Soc. 5A experiment with the cry, "Send us your cannon fodder; our enrollment is down!"?

Hopefully the Academic Council will endorse the substance of the Educational Policies Committee report regarding academic standards, and divisions will carefully study these proposals for implementation for the benefit of our students.

Joseph E. Ribal
Behavioral Sciences Division
December 6, 1977

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